

Teen Mothers and Their Infants: A Profile

This issue of our newsletter, Epi-Info, examines the health status of infants born to teen-age mothers in Lancaster County. Teen-age mothers, in this brief, are defined as mothers less than 20 years old who gave birth to a live baby. The variables (or health indicators) that will be discussed in this newsletter are: prenatal care, weight of the baby at the time of birth, tobacco and alcohol use by the mother during pregnancy, and pre-existing medical risk factors of the mother. We will also look at the trends of teen births during the decade of the 90s. In addition, descriptive attributes of the mother, such as age, race, and education will also be described. In the end, we will briefly discuss the public health impact of teen births on Lancaster County.

Teenage Birth Trends

There was a total of 3594 births in Lancaster County in 1999, out of which 343 births were recorded among women less than 20 years old (9.5% of all births). Figure 1 and figure 2 depict yearly birth trends in Lancaster County between 1990 and 1999. In general, Lancaster County witnessed a slight increase in proportions (Fig 1) and rates (Fig 2) of births to teen-age mothers during this period. Both the proportions and the rates reached an all time low in 1993 and 1995.

Figure 1: Teen Births* as a Percentage of All Births
Lancaster County 1990-1999

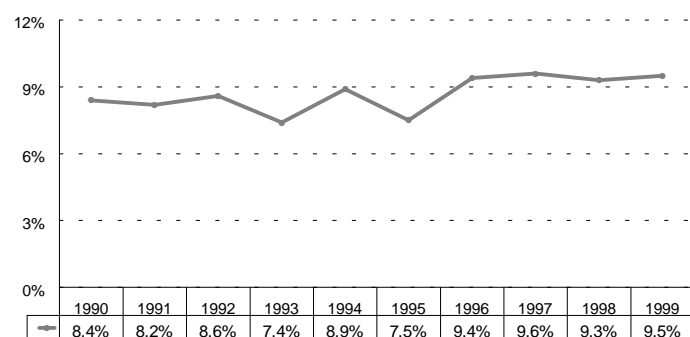
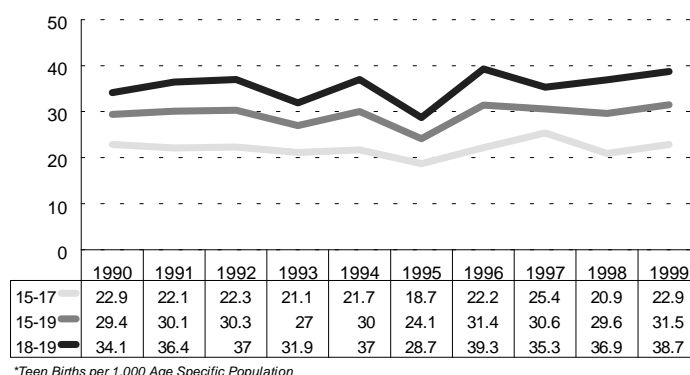


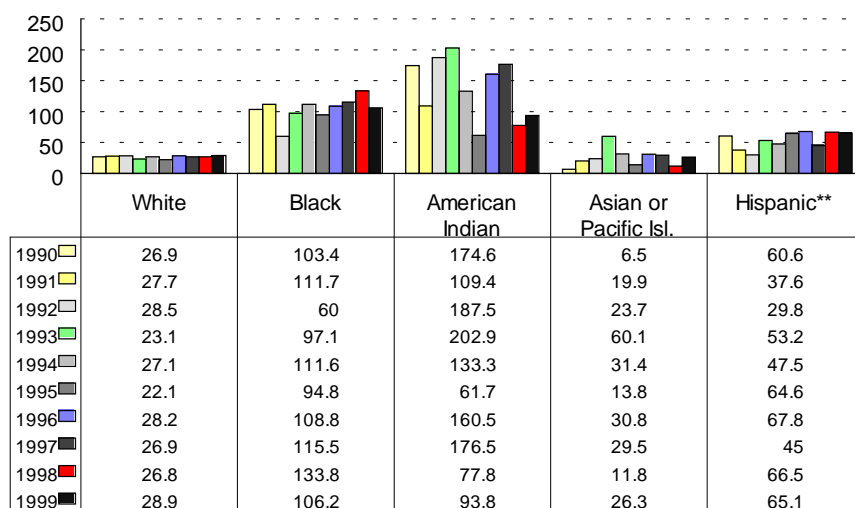
Figure 2: Teen Birth Rates*
Lancaster County 1990-1999



*Births to Mothers Under 20 Years of Age

*Teen Births per 1,000 Age Specific Population

Figure 3: Teen Birth Rates* for 15-19 Year Old Females by Race
Lancaster County 1990-1999



*Teen Births per 1,000 Age and Race Specific Population

**Of Any Race

Rates: Figure 2 indicates that birth rates among 15-to-19-year-old teenagers remained fairly stable from 1990 to 1998 with the exception of the 1993 and 1995 when they declined. However, in 1999 the teen birth rates increased by 6 percent from those of 1998. Between 1997 and 1999 the birth rates among older teens (18-19 years of age) has also increased, by 9.6 percent. However, these rates remained stable among younger teens (15-17 years of age).

While the US and Nebraska teen birth rates have continued to decline since 1991, Lancaster County rates have continued to go up slightly since 1991 (except 1993 and 1995). The rates have substantially increased from 1995 (24.1), the lowest point, to 1999 (31.5).

Racial/Ethnic Teen Birth Rates

Figure 3 shows the rates for all racial/ethnic groups in Lancaster County. Except for American Indians, all other ethnic groups have shown increase in rates from 1990 to 1999. The most remarkable increase (305%) was seen among Asians. American Indian rates, in general, show a continued decline into 1999. Birth rates for white teenagers show little fluctuations compared to all other ethnic groups. Black birth rates have continued to decline since 1997. While examining birth rates over the last two years, we conclude that except for Blacks and Hispanic (persons of Hispanic Origin), the rates have increased among other racial groups. The highest rates of teen births during the decade of 90s were observed among Blacks and American Indian/Native Alaskans.

The US teen birth rate data, on the other hand, shows that all racial groups continued their declines into 1999. The largest decline was noticed among American Indians.

Teen Births as a Percentage of All Births per Race

In 1999, one of every four Black births in Lancaster County was a teenage birth (25.6%), whereas one of every five American Indian births was a teenage birth (20.8%). Approximately 17 percent of Hispanic births were to teenagers compared with 9.3 percent among White and 4.7 among Asian/Pacific Islander.

Marital Status, Education, and Age of Teenage Mothers

The percentage of teen births that occur among unmarried teens grew considerably from 1990 (74.7) to 1999 (82.5) (Figure 4). The highest proportion was observed in 1998. More than 82 percent of all teen births took place among unmarried women in Lancaster County in 1999 (a 10 percent increase since 1990).

Figure 4: Unmarried Mothers as a Percentage of all Teen Births*
Lancaster County 1990-1999

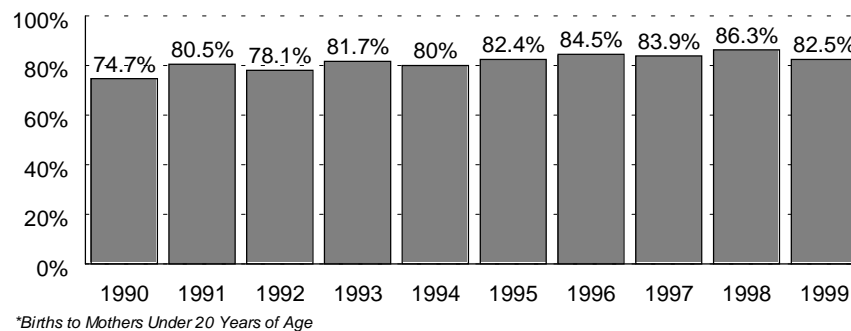


Figure 5: Education Among Teen Mothers*
Lancaster County 1999

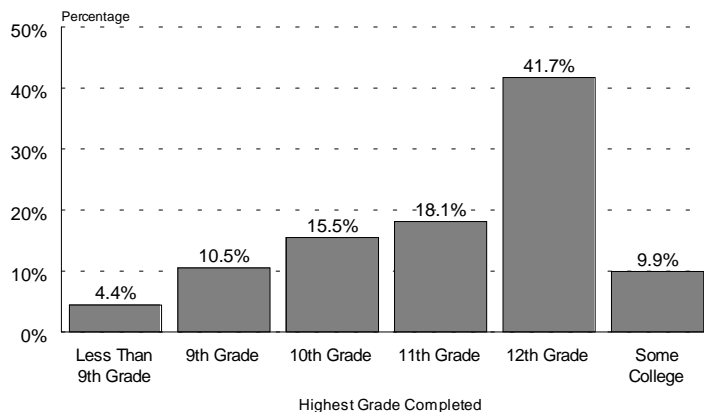
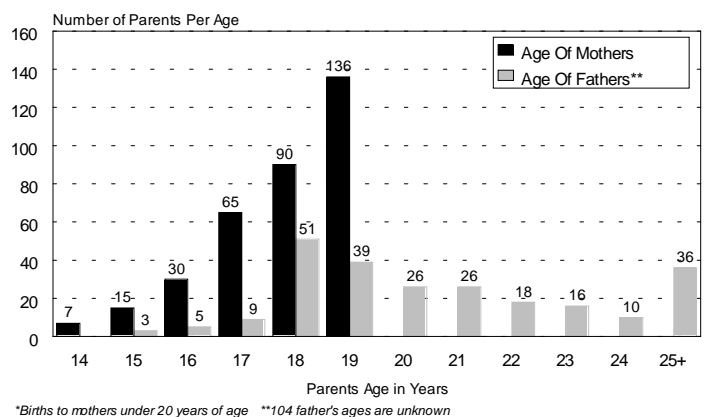


Figure 6: Ages of Mothers and Fathers in Teen Births*
Lancaster County 1998



In 1999, the highest percentage of teenage pregnancies in Lancaster County occurred among mothers who completed 12th grade, but had not had any college education (41.7%) (Figure 5). These teens were significantly more likely than teens completing any other grade level to have a child in 1999.

In 1999, the average age of a teenage female giving birth was 17.8 years old (Figure 6). In contrast, the average age of the father of a child born to a teenage mother was 21.2 years old. Furthermore, the age range of males who are the fathers of children born to teenage mothers ranged from 15 to 46 years of age. In addition, in 104 of the 343 teenage births, the fathers' age was not reported.

Health Status of Infants Born to Teens

Table 1 compares the health of infants born to teen mothers with those of older mothers. Teen mothers are more likely to experience behavioral risk factors for their pregnancies, inadequate prenatal care, and negative infant health outcomes. In 1999, teen mothers were more likely than older mothers to have babies with low birth weight.

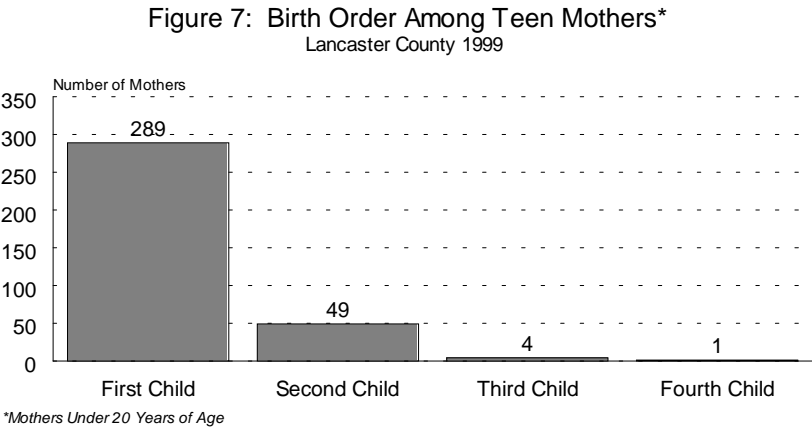
In 1999, the percentage of teen mothers in Lancaster County who received prenatal care in the first trimester, received ten or more prenatal visits during pregnancy, and received both prenatal care in the first trimester and ten or more prenatal visits was considerably lower than those of older mothers. Teenage mothers were also two and a half time more likely than older mothers to report tobacco use during pregnancy.

Impact of Teen Births on Our County

While national and state data show a marked decline in teen birth rates, Lancaster County data continues to show increase in teen birth rates. Teenage pregnancy has profound financial and human costs. Numerous studies have shown that teen mothers are less likely to complete their education and more likely to have limited career and economic opportunities. They are also more likely to rely on welfare, and to have failed marriages and future unintended pregnancies. Teen mothers are less likely to have the skills needed for parenting, and have higher risks for pregnancy-related complications. Our data clearly indicate that infants born to teens bear increased risks for negative health outcomes. The data also indicate that teen births are increasingly non-marital, and that fathers of children born to teenage females are, on average, 3.4 years older than the mother. Finally, our data show that teen births are increasing as a proportion of all births.

Awareness of these trends is important to community understanding of infant health and teen pregnancy in Lancaster County. The demographic changes and higher health risks involved in teen births should influence all community policies and services that have an impact on the health of infants, as well as on teen pregnancy.

Community concern about the health of teen births and pregnancies should lead to an appreciation of the social and economic factors that affect the health of teen pregnancies. Compared to older mothers, teen mothers tend to have fewer resources and opportunities for good health, as well as less family/social support, access to services, and health knowledge. Addressing these factors is an important step in creating strategies to improve the health of infants born to teens.



**Table 1: Infant Health Indicators, Risk Factors, And Prenatal Care
Among Teen and Older Mothers**
Lancaster County 1999

	Teen Mothers*	Older Mothers**
Low birth weight baby	7.6%	6.2%
Birth defect(s) to baby***	1.5%	2.9%
Average Apgar Score at:		
1 Minute	7.49	7.54
5 Minutes	8.57	8.68
Mother received prenatal care in first trimester	72.9%	87.8%
Mother received 10 or more prenatal visits	66.2%	78.5%
Mother received both first trimester care and 10 or more prenatal visits	57.1%	72.6%
Mother had medical risk factor for this pregnancy	18.7%	18.7%
Mother smoked during pregnancy	33.6%	14.4%
Mother drank alcohol during pregnancy	0.6%	1.1%

*Mothers Under 20 Years of Age

**Mothers Greater Than 19 Years of Age

***Data obtained from the Nebraska Birth Defects Registry, 1999

This newsletter is prepared by Pramod Dwivedi, the P.H. Epidemiologist, with the assistance from Jeff Armitage. Please direct your questions/comments to Pramod Dwivedi at 441-6271.

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